

Young and Beautiful (A freshmen generation of degenerate souls) by monkiimax

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Genre: Alternate Universe - High School, Cheating, Coming of Age, Crossovers & Fandom Fusions, Depression, Domestic Violence, F/F, F/M, Friendship, Implied/Referenced Rape/Non-con, Implied/Referenced Underage Prostitution, M/M, One-Sided Attraction, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, Past Rape/Non-con, Period-Typical Racism, Promiscuity, Romance, Self-Harm, Underage Drinking, Violence

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Summary:

Normal (non-monsters) AU Set in 1992.

The city of Derry and the Town of Hawkins are just a kilometer away from each other and, considering their population isn't that big, they share their high school building. There the Losers meet new friends that will only turn their lives upside down. Love, heartbreak, bad decisions, that is all part of growing up.

1. Videogames

Author's Note:

Setting: Instead of being the small town, Derry is an actual city in 1992. The kids are high school freshmen, in other words, between 14 and 15 (AU)

VIDEOGAMES

FIRST PERIOD

Bill walked down the hallway surrounded by his friends. Derry's high school was on its maximum capacity and people shoved each other as they tried to pass to get to class. The Loser's Club moved together surprised at the amount of people that could be held together inside one building, after all, Derry and Hawkins, being both small towns and just a kilometer away from each other, shared their high school building. The 5 kids that were currently chatting were known as the Loser's club. They had met at different stages of their lives and had stuck together after realizing number **does** make the strength. Bill had met Stan first during their first day of elementary school. Eddie, who entered a year later do to his mother's fear of him dying of some illness or accident, had started hanging out with them after the couple defended the smaller kid from some 6th graders. During their third year the trio finally had a reason to talk to the pretty girl of the their group, Beverly Marsh, but they didn't hang out until their first year of middle school when she started dating Bill. The fling didn't last long. After a couple of months Ben joined the group after being almost murdered by Henry and his gang. That had happened two years ago.

"What class do you have first?" asked Beverly as she peeked over Ben's shoulder.

"Math, then Biology." Ben answered while Bill groaned in annoyance aware he was sharing that class with him. Who on earth thought math as first period was a good idea? "What about you?"

"Social studies." Answered the girl somehow disappointed she wasn't

going to share her first class with her friends.

“Same!” added Eddie excited as he finally managed to decipher the introductory paper some teachers had given them after their first assembly of the year.

Stan, who was walking just behind the group decided to take a step forward and be part of the conversation. “We have lunch together? Right?”

“Y-y-es.” Answered Billy. “Wha-at is your f-f-first class, Stan?”

“History.” Stan took a look at the map of the school they had also handed them. He was about to whine about how on earth they would be able to find the classes when he felt someone push him to the side. “Hey!”

“Sorry, man! Need to find my class.” said a guy with curly hair and a funny face as he kept jogging without giving the group a second glance. Stan was about to say something when he was shoved again. This time his side hit the lockers. Two boys and a girl passed running following the first one. Only the slowest one, a skinny kid with enormous eyes and brown hair, took the time to turn around and apologize before trying to catch up with his friends.

“Rude.” Eddie mumbled. Stan agreed but decided to leave the subject alone. He had a class to get to himself.

“I think this morning the only class I’m going to share with you guys is nutrition so... see you later?” said Beverly as she started turning away from the group.

“Yeah.” Ben took her by the wrist and leaned on to plant a soft kiss on her cheek. The girl blushed furiously making her cheeks as red as her short hair. “Have a nice first day.”

The rest of the guys rolled their eyes in annoyance. Since Ben and Beverly had decided to start dating during the summer, the other 3 losers had to put up with their corny gestures and goodbyes.

“I guess I’ll see you later too.” Eddie arranged his oversized backpack and followed Beverly.

The rest walked together to the second floor where they parted; Ben and Bill turned right while Stan followed the corridor on the left. The boy walked with his eyes fixed on the map still in his hands even though he knew where he was going, it was just that he wasn't interested in making eye contact with anybody. Suddenly he felt someone pass too close to him. The boy pushed his shoulders softly but it was enough to make the two of them look up. It was just an instant that their eyes met but Stan felt something strange in that boy. There was something odd on those dark eyes and sickish paleness. The other boy didn't apologize or look away, instead, he made the gesture of being about to laugh but stopped before a sound came out of his lips.

And just like that the moment was over. The two boys looked away and kept walking on opposite directions.

SECOND PERIOD

Mike entered the classroom feeling extremely anxious. That would be his first day attending to a real school (and first class considering he had lost first period due to some paperwork problem) and he could already feel the numerous eyes glued on his back and hear the murmurs coming from the rest of the students. The English teacher, an old woman with white hair and sweet smile, welcomed him and, after reading the note that explained why he was late for class, told him to sit next to a young girl that seemed too interested in her closed notebook before her.

"I know this is the first time for both of you being in a classroom so I want you to make each other company." said the woman with a sympathetic smile on her face. "Now, let's start the class. My name is Mrs. Robinson..."

Mike took a notebook and some pens from his bag, scared he would miss anything that the teacher could say of importance. On his right, the girl remained quiet and immobile. Mike took a quick glance on her direction and noticed she didn't have anything to write with.

"Hey?" the young boy whispered as he leaned towards her. "Do you

have a pen?"

The girl looked up at him and, after a moment of doubt, shook her head making her brown curls move slightly.

Mike smiled at her and offered her his blue pen. "Here, take mine."

She didn't move for a second, like if she was afraid that Mike would do something to her if she decided to accept his offer, but then, like a scared animal, she moved her hand slowly until it reach Mike's.

"Thanks." her voice was so low and quiet the boy almost missed it.

"My name is Mike."

The girl looked away and opened her notebook. She started writing on it slowly. Mike decided to let it go and keep his focus on the class in front of him. Like his grandfather had told him before dropping him off on the principal's office: he was there to study, anything else was a plus.

English was over rather quickly. Mike put his things back into his bag and was looking at his schedule when he saw the girl trying to give him back the pen.

"You can keep it." said the boy with a friendly smile. The girl for the first time returned the smile. "What is your next class?"

She raised her shoulder and took her own piece of paper from her old backpack. "Art."

Mike smile grew bigger. "That's great, I'm heading over there too. Shall we go?"

The girl nodded and the couple left the classroom. They walked in silence: Mike contemplating his surroundings and her staring furiously at her feet.

"El" she said out of nowhere.

"What?"

“El.” she repeated, this time a little louder. “My name is El.”

THIRD PERIOD

Dustin wasn't happy. After being used to share almost all his classes with his best friends he felt betrayed as he listened to the science teacher all by his own. Yes, there were other people in his class, and he was already sharing the lab tale with other student. What was his name, again? It started with an E, he wa sure of that. Dustin groaned, he had always loved science but he missed having Will and Lucas by his side to hear his geeky jokes. Suddenly something happened that made him forget his internal whinings. A boy had just stormed inside the room without knocking or asking for permission to get in first. The teacher glared at the man and immediately demanded an explanation.

“Sorry, my name is Richard Tozier and I got lost.” He said as he tried to catch his breathe. Dustin inspected the guy, there as something funny about him. He was one of the tallest kid he had ever ran into and his messy curly hair surrounded a face that would be whiter if it wasn't for the burning cheeks he had because of his evident race against the clock.

“Let this be the first and last time you are late for my class.” Mr. Sue said and the kid ran to the nearest empty seat, Dustin's table. “That goes for all of you too.”

The new boy, Richie, faked a smile but didn't add anything. The man turned around and started talking again.

“What an entrance.” Dustin said after the bell rang finishing the lesson. Richie smiled and shrugged it off.

“What can I say? Go big or go home.”

"Isn't being late a bad first impression?" Answered the other boy in the table.

"I still have other eight classes, I guess I will be improving by the end of the week." Joked the boy. "I'm sorry, I think we haven't been correctly introduced. Well, I was. I mean, I think the whole class already knows my name and my incapacity of following directions."

"My name is Edward."

Richie's eyes frowned but he was still smiling with his lips. "That name is for grown ups. What do people call you?"

"Eddie, my friends call me Eddie." Richie nodded and then his head turned to Dustin, whom assumed was asking him the same question.

"Dustin, nice to meet you."

Richie's smile shrunk for a second. "Yeah, I remember you from science last year."

"Really?" now Dustin felt bad because he couldn't remember the kid.

"Yeah, you and your friends were in the "video-something-club" and I think you won something in a science fair." added Richie. "I'm glad I sit next to you in this class."

Eddie looked at Dustin sort of surprised. "It looks you were quite popular at Hawkin's middle school."

Dustin was about to answer but the bell warning the kids they were late for their next class made him stop. He wasn't sure who ran first, all he knew was that his class was on the other side of the building and he was never the fastest kid in P.E.

LUNCH

"Okay, since Eddie brought his homemade lunch I vote he should go and find a good table for us." said Beverly as they approached the cafeteria. The rest of the group agreed even though Bill was a little

worried Eddie wouldn't stand a chance if some older students decided to take the place he could possibly select. Or worse, if Henry and the rest of his crew decided to make a move if they saw the kid alone. As they entered the big room filled with tables and chairs, they realized they weren't going to have any problem getting a table enough for the five of them. It looked like the place was already organized and people had left some tables on the back of the room for the freshmen. The line to the serving area wasn't long but maybe it was because the group had decided to wait and get together before going inside the cafeteria.

"Well, let's get our food before we run out of time." said Beverly as she took the lead and walked towards the serving area.

Eddie sat on the first table he saw completely empty and, after sanitizing it, started taking out his lunch. After a pretty nasty fight with his mother he had finally managed to stop her from making him lunch and let him do it instead. That day he had packed a sandwich, an apple (for the first time not cut into pieces that turn brown after an hour), some cookies he had bought on his way to the school and a bottle of water. He put everything over a paper towel he had folded before leaving his house and, after everything was in order, he took out a his notebook to keep up with some sketches he had been working on during summer. He hadn't even gotten to the page he was looking for when he heard a familiar voice near him.

"Hey, Eddie." Dustin appeared from behind him and took a seat next to him. Three kids followed him and sat on the table. Eddie blinked. Now he remembered, during science he had felt he had seen that boy before but now he realized that kid was the one that had pushed Stanley that morning. And now they were using their table?

"Wait, those places are already occupied."

The only girl of the group, a ginger with hard green eyes and messy hair, glared at him. "I don't see anyone around."

"They are getting their lunches."

"Man, there are enough places for everyone." added the boy next to her.

“But...” Eddie tried to fight but the last boy, the slow one if he could recall, interrupted him.

“How many friends are getting their food?”

“Five.”

“See? This place has 11 chairs.” Dustin concluded while he took his food out of his lunchbox. “ By the way let me introduce you to my friends. Guys, these is Eddie, he is my partner in science. Eddie, those are my friends: Will...” he said pointing at the one Eddie remembered was the slowest of the group. “...Lucas...” the dark skinned boy raised his hand in sort of a greeting gesture. “and Max.” the girl raised her chin in acknowledgement but immediately returned her focus to the food on her plate.

“But...” he tried again but he was again stopped by a feminine voice. This time he recognized it as Bev’s.

“Eddie? Who are your new friends?” she said as she took a place next to Eddie. Ben followed her and sat next to her. Bill and Stan stood still not sure how to react to those people.

“My name is Dustin. I was just introducing Eddie to my friends: Will, Lucas and Max...” The three kids smiled at the new comers but didn't add anything. “And we were just talking about how the table is big enough for everyone.”

“Of course, we are always happy to meet new people.” answered Beverly while she kicked Ben under the table.

“Exactly.” added the boy with a half smile.

Eddie groaned. Now he was going to look like a douchebag. During the awkward exchange Stan and Bill had taken their seats near his friends while leaving two empty seats between them and the Hawkins kids.

They talked a little between each other: Lucas and Max were having their private conversation, Will and Dustin were sharing some stories about their new classes while Bev and Eddie discussed about some project for Social Studies and Ben and Bill were in the middle of an

argument about who was best: Poe or Lovecraft. Stan was happy staying out of everybody's conversations and focusing on his newest guide to birds.

"Hey look at that." Will said out of the blue making everyone turn around. Two kids had just entered to the crowded cafeteria and it seemed some people had decided to take a second of their time, like them, to inspect the odd couple. The boy, *the homeschooled boy*, Eddie recalled, was walking next to a girl that seemed to be dressed up with boy's clothing.

"That's her, isn't she?" asked Lucas almost in a whisper. The Losers glared at them, demanding an explanation.

Dustin was the first one to answer. "We believe she is a lost-girl who was just found a couple of weeks ago."

"F-found like r-r-un-a-away?" asked Bill but Lucas shook his head.

"Like in abducted. A man had her hidden for almost fifteen years inside a hidden lab on the outskirts of Hawkins."

"They say he made experiments with her and that she has powers or something like that." added Max as she made some gesture with her hands.

"Poor girl." said Bev as she turned around to take a second look. That was when they noticed they were walking towards them.

At first everyone thought they were approaching the table because they had heard what they were discussing about the girl. The whole group remained silent and tried to look everywhere else except on their direction; everyone except Ben.

"Hey Mike!" the boy said as he waved at the two kids. Mike walked a little faster.

"Hello man. I'm glad I finally found you." he said and then he pulled the girl that seemed was trying to hide behind her friend. "Let me introduce you to El. El, he is Ben, the friend from the book-club I was talking about." The girl faked a smile and immediately retreated to her hiding spot. "Can we sit?"

“Sure, the more the merrier.” Max mumbled between teeth and Eddie couldn't help to smile. At least he wasn't the only one annoyed by the amount of people in their table.

Mike sat next to Stan while El occupied the only chair left. Mike's addition caused a big change on the table; now almost everyone seemed interested in talking to each other like if they were only one group of friends instead of two. Some of them like Bev, Dustin and Mike lead the conversation but the rest, excluding Stan and El, didn't mind keeping up with them. Everything ran smoothly for a while until it was 10 minutes before lunch was over. It was then when Richie appeared.

“Dustin! Eds! What a nice surprise!” the boy said as he ran towards the table. “Hey, do you mind if I sit?”

Eddie and Max were about to say there were no more chairs when Stan's voice captured everyone's attention. “Sure. You can steal a chair.” he said with a neutral voice as he pointed at some empty chairs from the table next to them. Even though his voice seemed indifferent all his friends knew that something was up. Stan and the newcomer looked at each other for a second and exchange a special kind of smile. Richie placed the chair between Stan and Mike.

“The name is Richie, if anyone is interested.” he said to the whole group but his interest returned shortly towards Stan that was now ignoring him by reading his book. Bill and Eddie exchanged confused looks, that was odd.

The rest of the lunch it was constant battle of who could talk more and louder between Dustin, Bev and Richie (and who could curse more in the case of the two boys). When lunch ended and everyone had to part ways some of them decided it would be cool to share table considering most of them shared classes at some point.

FRIDAY

Watching all our friends fall

In and out of Old Paul's

This is my idea of fun

Richie was sitting on his own when he saw most of his new friends leave the school building. He pressed the top button of his walk-man and waited for them to get closer. The three girls lead the group while they talked between each other, well, Beverly and Max talked, El just listened. Behind them Eddie and Will were chatting like normal people while Ben, Lucas and Mike were discussing about something that was on the book the first one was holding. Richie smiled at the scene. He couldn't believe he was actually friends with those people. He found hard to believe he had friends at all.

After that first day during lunch Richie had found that you could actually get along with people if he gave them a chance. At first it was odd, being the only one with no previous group of friends to hold on to and sometimes it was pretty obvious not all of them got along at the instant. For example, El; she and Mike had bonded quite easily but the girl always looked on edge, like a frightened animal ready to fight or run. Or Eddie, the smallest kid on the group during the first days barely said anything and acted annoyed by the single presence of other people inside his group (Richie had felt offended at first but then he noticed the boy did the same with El, Dustin and Lucas). Funny thing he got along with the other apparently apathetic person in the picture, Max. And then he had Stan. Richie smiled at the thought of him. Stan didn't talk to anybody, he barely did with his previous friends, but sometimes there were exchanges between him and Richie. And Richie felt more at comfortable with him and he felt sort of bad because Dustin was amazing too. But being honest, he was more upset about not seeing Stan walking with the group because baseball practice.

Richie noticed that the group was now close enough to see him and put his headphones inside his bag he ran towards them, excited about the news he was about to give them.

"Hey guys!" he said with a big bright smile on his face. "Guess who are going to their first high-school-party tonight?"

Playing video games

2. What Makes Us

Summary for the Chapter:

The kids go to their first highschool party... Things take an unexpected turn.

Warnings: Underage drinking and cursing.

Their first high-school party.

Eddie, Bill, Ben, Mike and Stan reached the house hidden inside the forest that divided Derry with Hawkins a little past 9 and there was already a world of people around. Most of them were freshmen and juniors but the group could see some cars parked around the house and the smell of nicotine and alcohol was perceptive even outside the building.

“I say we turn around and leave this place before our parents figure out we lied to them.” proposed Eddie as he made an attempt to start climbing up his bike.

“We can't, the rest of the group is waiting for us inside.” said Mike trying not to sound too intimidated. Okay, his high-school experience was moving rather quickly.

“First of all, the only one of *our* group who is waiting for us is Beverly and we could invite her to join us on abandoning this nonsense.” Eddie seriously didn't want to enter to that place.

Stan rolled his eyes.

“C-c-come on Eddie, I can ass-s-sure you it-t-t's not g-g-oing t-t-to be t-t-tha-at b-b-ad.” Bill stutter making his point go down the drain. His stutter was always worse when he felt nervous or anxious.

“Plus, we are all together.” Ben placed his bike next to a tree and locked its chain around it. “Give it an hour. If you are not feeling it we all go and do whatever we usually do at a Friday's night.”

Stan followed Ben's advice and, after taking Eddie's bike away from him, he locked them to the same tree. It was settle. They were going in.

The group entered in silence and looked around inspecting their surroundings. Almost everyone at the party was holding red and blue cups; places like the stairs, kitchen and dining room looked to be the designated areas for people to talk while the livingroom worked as dancefloor where teenagers were trying to dance while pushing each other around. They found Beverly with El and Max in the kitchen serving themselves something that looked like punch but smelled nothing like it.

"Guys! I was worried you were going to ditch us!" she screamed as she launched herself and hugged Bill and Ben at the same time. She had told the boys that afternoon that she was going to go with Max and El to Hawkins in order to get ready with her new girl-friends. It would be an understatement say that she was glad she finally knew girls that didn't hate her or thought she was easy. The girls behind her smiled at them politely.

"Where is the rest of your crew?" asked Stan as he looked around. Max raised her shoulders while she took a sip of her cup.

"I guess they are running late, I heard Will was going to ask his brother to lend him the car."

"He can drive? I thought you had to be 16 to get your licence."

"He *can* drive, but he *isn't* allowed to." added Max. "Would you like some poison?"

"What is it?" Eddie took a step forward and inspected the liquid.

"Jungle juice." answered El. "They have bowls with the same thing around the house."

"Is it good?" Eddie frowned as Beverly started passing them red cups without asking them for their opinion.

"You can almost miss the burning sensation of the vodka running down your throat." Beverly wasn't going to let the boys go on sober

so she made her personal goal to serve each one of them a full cup of it. "Here, drink up." She gave Ben the last one and gave him a soft kiss on the lips.

It was odd that the couple did PDA in front of their friends, mostly because the Losers never missed the opportunity to mess with them and they knew Bill felt awkward in those cases, but the group just assumed it was the juice what was making her more affectionate. Bill looked away from the scene and sighed as he swallowed the drink. Maybe it was because he wasn't used to drinking but he could totally spot the vodka on that thing. How much alcohol did that had in it?

He looked around and found everyone drinking the thing with ease and not making a big fuss out of it. He spotted by the corner of his eyes Stan looking at him with a sad expression, like if he could read on his face the discomfort of having Bev and Ben so close to him. *Where there was fire, ashes remain* ; and he had a six years amount of ashes between his hands. He decided to better keep his eyes on the cup between his hands; maybe he was just overreacting. He drank again. Beverly cheered on him and he took a third zip. Was it too soon to feel lightheaded? On his right El was serving herself a little more and Mike refilled his cup. He looked to his left and saw that Ben and Beverly had passed from little and sweets peeks to almost French-kissing in front of the whole party. He looked away again.

Someone appeared right beside him blocking him the view of his two friends eating each other and Bill felt his muscles relax as he recognized Stan's presence.

"Wasn't Richie supposed to come to this thing?" Bill said out of the blue. If he was going to feel uncomfortable, his best friend was going down with him.

"I don't know what makes you think I care if he comes or not." Stan rolled his eyes and drank a little bit from his cup. Bill smiled. He knew Stan and he was sure he had *implicitly* asked Max about Richie, considering he was from Hawkins too.

"Sure, Stan." He mumbled. As a response he received the impact of a skinny elbow between his ribs and a small chuckle from his friend's lips.

Dustin and the rest of the boys arrived almost thirty minutes and three cups later. They were currently on the backyard talking and listening to the music that filtered through the open windows.

“Yo!” shouted Dustin as they approached the group with a box between his hands.

Everyone shouted back, some more tipsy than others.

“You asses!” Max groaned when Dustin finally sat near her and left the box before them. “What took you so long?”

“Will had to convince Jonathan to give him the keys of the car.” Lucas sat next to Max and planted a kiss on her hair as he did so. “And then we made a stop at Steve’s in order to blackmail him and get these.” He opened the box and took out a can of beer.

“No way!” Bill gasped as he realized there were 24 cans of beer inside of it.

“Steve gave them to you?” Max took one can as well. “God, with what did you blackmail him?”

“You are better off not knowing.” Will felt a shiver run down his spine as he remembered the secret. Max nodded and opened her can without adding anything else.

“What are you waiting for? Dig in!” Dustin took three cans and offered them to Mike and El who were closest to him. Mike took his and El, after a little hesitation, reached to grab hers.

El, just like the other girls, had decided to ditch the rule of putting up dresses and the three were using dark jeans and comfortable shoes. But El was using an oversized black sweater that made her look... different from what she usually looked during school hours. Dustin didn't register he was staring at the girl a little too aggressively.

“Do I have something?” She asked nervous.

“No, no... you look really pretty.” He mumbled. The girl smirked.

“Bitchin.”

“What?”

Max and Bev burst out into laughter at the same time.

“She doesn't look *pretty*, she looks bitchin.”

Dustin blushed instantly making El's smile wider. “Sorry, you are right. You look bitching.” He opened his can and then hers. “Cheers?”

The girl took a long gulp but immediately pulled away.

“This tastes horrible.”

Mike took a zip from his. “Yeah, you have to get used to its flavor.”

El shook her face and gave Dustin her beer. “I don't like it.”

“More for me.” Richie's voice captured everyone's attention as he grabbed El's unfinished beer.

“Hey!” Dustin complained but Richie was already drinking it.

“Come on, you can't possibly believe that indirect-kiss-bullshit?” He answered earning a lot of whistles and oohhs from their friends. Dustin's face became three shades of red in a couple of seconds while El looked around confused. Max put her arm over her shoulders in a sign of ‘ *I'll explain it to you later* ’.

Remember how we used to party up all night?

Sneaking out and looking for a taste of real life?

The party went on and, as the time passed, the chaos on the house grew. More and more people were getting drunk. The music was becoming louder and louder and things were getting broken inside and out of the house. The group was still on the backyard and the beer was almost gone. While some couples, like Ben and Beverly and Lucas and Max were busy making out on the grass, the rest of the

group was either talking or trying to dance. Dustin had convinced El he could teach her to some “nice-moves” and now the two were just moving around while holding hands; Mike and Bill were having a dance off nearby while Stan and Richie were talking in whispers near Eddie and Will, the only sobers left.

“What are we going to do?” asked Eddie with stern voice.

Will looked at him puzzled. “About what?”

“About our stupid friends!” he shouted. They were in a crisis and it looked like nobody had noticed it. It was past midnight, Derry was an almost 10-minute ride by bike and he was pretty sure no one was going to be able to ride anywhere in that state. Hell, he was sure Stan’s father was going to kill him for ignoring his curfew and he had no idea what Mike had told his grandfather or how upset he could be. “How the fuck we are going to get back to the city?”

Will nodded and thought about it for a minute. “I could drive you all.”

“And then what?” Eddie passed his fingers through his hair. “How the hell are we going to get them into their houses without their parents noticing?”

“Well, I guess I’m also not too thrilled to face the sheriff wrath if he finds out El has been drinking.” Will added. “or...”

Eddie stared at him. “Or what?”

“My brother and I made a little cabin some years ago in the middle of the forest, to the north of Hawkins. I have some stuff there like cushions and blankets. The boys and I used to sleep over there during summer.” Eddie nodded, starting to understand where Will wanted to go with that. “We could crash there and then... we’ll see.”

It was an idea, a pretty good idea but not in the long run. If they went there, the Hawkins kids would be safe and near their respective houses, but the rest? They would still have to ride all the way to Derry and made excuses for arriving so late. God, his mother was going to kill him! Eddie looked around and spotted all of his

friends; they were so fucked up. There was no way they were riding home in the middle of the night through the forest.

“Alright.” He mumbled.

“Alright.” Will answered as he nodded.

“Now let’s get to problem number two.” Eddie stood up and rubbed his face, preparing himself from the task before him. “How do we put all this nine idiots inside your car?”

Drinking in the small town firelight

“I’m going to puke!” Richie screamed from the back. Will stepped on the brake so quickly the whole group hit themselves with each other.

“Get out!” he screamed. Little did he care if Richie puked on the only elementary school yard of Hawkins, he needed to return the car puke free. “Now!”

Everyone in the back stormed off. A little too late Will noticed he had been fooled.

“See you, suckers!” they heard Richie screamed.

All the drunk kids ran to the little kids’ games. It was almost 1:00 am and Will and Eddie were exhausted. At the party it had taken them good thirty minutes put everyone inside the vehicle considering most of them tried to run away to get more jungle juice. *That damn liquid* , Will cursed as he exited the car. Eddie followed him and the two boys stared at the scene before them. Nine freshmen playing around like little kindergarteners. *Stupid, stupid alcohol* .

“What do we do now?” Eddie asked. Will raised his shoulders. There was no way he was going to gather everyone back into the car.

“Hey, come here!” Beverly was standing on what looked to be a cartoon of a pirate ship. Richie was behind her and was playing with the fake telescope that was attached to the game. “Live a little you wet towels.”

(Pabst Blue Ribbon on ice)

Eddie and Will exchanged looks. "What do you say?"

Eddie smiled at him. "What the hell. We are already here."

"And at least we will not be hungover tomorrow." Will sighed and put the keys into his jacket's pocket.

Sweet sixteen and we had arrived

Walking down the streets as they whistle, "Hi, hi!"

Being drunk was like living inside a bubble. She was there, she could see, hear and everything, but it's all in a blur. Beverly was enjoying that feeling. It was a mix of numbness and overstimulation. Things felt so far away but so electric at the same time.

She didn't remember how she had gotten to the playground but she was enjoying the games like if she was six again. Someone pushed her and her feet left the ground. She was on the swing. She registered a voice next to her screaming in joy. Or she was the one screaming? No, both of them were.

She jumped and didn't land as gracefully as she would have liked. But it didn't hurt. On the contrary, she laughed. Two hands took her by the arms and pulled her up. Ben was looking at her with worry but there was a hint of a drunken smile hidden on the corner of his lip. She pulled him closer and kissed him.

She liked kissing. She liked when she was the one that kissed. That sense of power, of being desired, it was amazing. His arms surrounded her waist and pulled her closer. Where were the rest of the group? Were they alone? She couldn't hear them. She didn't care she couldn't hear them. All she cared was how good it felt to kiss and to be drunk at the same time.

There she was my new best friend

High heels in her hands, swayin' in the wind

While she starts to cry, mascara runnin' down her little Bambi eyes:

Bill went down the slide and sat there for a moment. He was dizzy, his legs felt like jelly. Part of him wanted that feeling to end while the other part was having too much fun ignoring the world around him. Someone tried to go down the slide and it's body collapsed against his. It didn't felt heavy so he guessed it was probably one of the girls. Two arms surrounded his shoulders and pulled him back. They were so skinny... Bill closed his eyes and let himself being hugged. He was surprised when he heard Max's voice him near his right ear.

"You are nice Denbrough." she whispered and Bill felt a shiver run down his spine. "You shouldn't be torturing over... whatever you have been torturing yourself all night long."

Bill shook his head. Was he that obvious? "I don't..."

"Guys are usually assholes. All girls know that." she interrupted. Bill turned around and stared at her. She was rocking back and forth and her eyes were practically closed. Her hair covered part of her face but he could see she was upset. Was she crying? "Assholes. Boys are all full of shit."

"What about Lucas?" Max smiled at him and threw her head backwards. "Lucas... Lucas, Dustin, you... you are nice guys. That is why you never get the girl." her head twisted and her long hair fell over her shoulders. Bill was curious if those bruises were hickies or bruises. He made a mental note he would ask her later. He forgot about that twenty minutes later. "I hope Ben is a good guy. Bev needs a good guy. She needs a good guy. Tell me... is Ben a good guy?"

"What about you?" Bill couldn't believe those words were leaving his mouth. "Don't you want a good boy?"

Bill nodded. Max smiled at him and pressed her lips against his. It didn't feel sexual or anything like the kisses Bill had experienced before. It felt more like a hug or a pat on his back. "You are a good guy." she chuckled but Bill heard it like a sob. "Why guys aren't good

like you?"

"Lana, how I hate those guys."

Sweet sixteen and we had arrived

Cheering our names in the pink spotlight

Drinkin' cherry schnapps in the velvet night

Stan was lost... and wet. That was all that he knew. He recalled flashes of what had happened the last minutes (hours?) of his life. He remembered leaving the playground with Dustin, El and Richie and running down the street. After that his mind jumped to him standing in the middle of a store. There... he had grabbed some chips but he didn't remember paying for them... Stan pressed his hands against his forehead. They were wet too. Where was he?

After that another black spot and the next thing he remembered was being carried by Richie across a park. He was still in the park? Stan looked around. Yes, he was still in the park with the other three and he was sitting inside a fountain. Well, that explained somethings.

"Stan-the-man!" Richie screamed as she splashed his way to Stan and threw himself on top of the guy. "Isn't this place amazing. The water is so good." he giggled. Stan wrapped his arms around Richie and pulled him so they were almost underwater. Richie was right, it was great.

They stood there for a couple of seconds. Stan was able to open his eyes under the water and saw that Richie was no longer using his glasses. Wait a second? Was he wearing them while they were at the party? He couldn't remember.

We used to go break in

To the hotel, glimmer and we'd swim

Suddenly he registered a sound. It sounded far away but he could recognize it: a police siren. He opened his mouth and let the air

escape his lungs as he launched his body forward. Dustin was already helping Eleven jump out of the fountain. She wasn't wearing her sweater but it looked Dustin had given her his (also soaked) jacket to cover herself.

"Abort!" the boy shouted.

Runnin' from the cops in our black bikini tops

Screaming, "Get us while we're hot..."

Stan jumped up and help Richie stand up. Now the sirens sounded closer and he could swear he had seen the reflection of the blue and red light. The four teenagers ran across the park opposite from where they had heard the sirens. The stumbled a couple of times but they reached the street in no time. Richie was about to cross the street when the sound of a car stopping violently made him jump back to the street. The group stood immobile, sure they had been busted when they recognized the car and the voice of the driver.

"Get in, you idiots!" Will shouted. Everyone jumped into the car without caring about landing on top of the rest of their friends. Stan had not closed the door when Will stepped on the accelerator. When Stan turned around he noticed the police patrol turning the corner.

"Why are you wet?" Beverly asked as she tried to push Dustin off her.

"Where were you? We looked for you everywhere!" Eddie said as he turned around from the copilot seat and glared at Stan.

"El? Does Hopper work the night shift today?" Will asked with shaking voice. The silence of the girl was enough answer. "Shit!"

"What do we do?!"

Stan looked around. Richie was smiling triumphant at the scene. Stan let a sigh leave his lips. Now that the alcohol was leaving his system (maybe because of the water, maybe because of the fear of being caught) he was feeling anxious and cold.

"Turn right!" shouted Richie while he climbed his way to the copilot seat and sat in Eddie's lap. "Here!"

Get us while we are hot

The car turned and everyone screamed at the same time. Stan grabbed a random hand and squeezed it. He guessed it was Bill's or Beverly.

"Now?"

Stan saw Richie bit his bottom lip. "Left and then right again. We need to get to the highway."

"I can't turn left!"

"You are already driving 80 mph, with a bunch of drunk underages and no licence. Driving the wrong way is the least of your problems."

The car turned left in the last second.

(Come on take a shot)

"We are in the highway, now what?" Will was freaking out. No, he was on the edge of having a panic attack.

Richie looked back and then he pointed at a small space where it looked the fence had been broken a while ago. "Turn off the lights and go inside that hole." Will's eyes went wide. "Now!"

Will nodded and did as told. The patrol was way too behind them so they didn't notice when they entered the forest. As it passed the teenagers held their breathe. They waited a couple of minutes, worried the cab would turn around and find them. It didn't.

"No way." Will whispered.

Eddie looked at him and then at Richie who was still sitting on him. His whole face flushed but didn't push him away. Suddenly a little laugh interrupted the quietness inside the car. El laughed with mouth wide open and her eyes closed. Stan mimicked her and so did Dustin and then Richie. Soon everyone inside was laughing.

3. Radio (Aftermath)

Summary for the Chapter:

After the storm comes the temporary calm...

Notes for the Chapter:

Warnings: Mentions of child abuse and past sexual abuse

Radio

Max was told she had strong eyes. In California it was known a bad look from the girl could turn your blood into ice and make you crumble like a paper castle. She was proud of that. That was why she was so surprised to see her eyes shiver as she stared at her own reflection through the window. She could see the start of a bruise on her left eye, courtesy of her stupid stepfather. As a kid she had thought only stepsisters and stepmothers were evil. She knew women could be more cruel than men but now she knew guys could hurt more than a girl.

A sigh left her lips and the steam made part of her face disappear for a second. With her finger she drew a broken heart but immediately cleaned it with the sleeve of her sweater. Her mother had grounded her for a month but she couldn't care less. It wasn't hard to sneak out her room considering it was in the first floor. Still, she couldn't shake the shame she felt when her husband slapped her the moment they got into the house. She had cried and she hated to cry. She was strong. She never cried.

Not even they can stop me now

Boy, I be flying overhead

She opened the window without problem and jumped out with her

skate under her arm. She needed some fresh air. *It will only be a couple of hours* , she thought bitterly as she rode down the street, *I need time away from that house* . She knew where she wanted to be even though she was broke. The Arcade was a good place to blend in and disappear for a while. Plus, it was always fun to see other people screw up their games; she always learned from other's mistakes.

It took her almost a half and hour to get to the place and found it crowded with boys of all ages trying to burn off the steam of the first week of classes. She entered the place and looked around, hopeful she would find some of her friends but aware it was an empty hope considering they were all probably grounded too. But to her surprise she found Richie standing in a corner waiting for his turn on one of the newest machines.

"Hello Rich." Max said the moment she was close enough. The boy smiled at her.

"Well, isn't Madmax in person." he said with a weird accent. "Are you here to put your alias in this machine as well?"

"Dustin told you."

"Actually it was Lucas." he returned to his normal voice. "He talked about it like if he had done it himself. I guess he is just proud to be with a celebrity."

The girl rolled her eyes and was about to answer him back when the boy playing cursed out loud and hit the machine with his foot. "Stupid game." he mumbled before leaving. Richie took out a quarter.

"Who goes first?"

Max sighed. "You go. I'm broke at the moment and dear momma didn't give me money to come."

"Well, she let you out of the house." Richie commented as she put the coin inside and pressed the start button.

"I don't have permission to be here." she admitted. Richie nodded but kept his eyes fixed on the screen. "But I needed to get out."

"Parents suck." he added while he killed some monsters. Max nodded.

"Indeed." she leaned over the machine and watched as Richie played in silence. "What about you? Your parents didn't lock you up for getting drunk."

Richie shrugged. "Not really." he pushed his glasses back and kept playing.

Max nodded again.

"Did your old man do that to you?" Max glared at him. Richie was looking at her while still killing monsters with his fingers. "Your eye."

"He is not my father." she hissed as she looked away. "My mother married a brute and now I'm stuck with him and his stupid son until I turn 18."

Richie was no longer playing when Max looked towards him. Instead he was holding a quarter between his fingers.

"Here, kill some fictional motherfuckers." he said. Max smiled at him and took the coin. "Do you think you can put your name in this brand new game?"

Max pressed start. "I don't know. This is my first time playing this shit."

Richie took her place next to the machine to watch her play. "If your eyes were the gun I bet you would break the machine."

Max let her concentration slip for a moment. Her eyes. The game was set during night time so she was able to see her reflection on the screen. Her eyes were sharp and fierce again. She smiled at them and kept playing. It took her two more games but she was able to place herself on the top scores.

Their heavy words can't bring me down

Boy I've been raised from the dead.

The telephone rang a couple of times but Beverly ignored it. She knew who it was and she had no desire to hear his voice. No, she was more comfortable sitting next to the window of the kitchen smoking a cigarette. A couple of rings later her aunt answered and asked in a pretty annoyed voice who was it. Beverly half turned her face towards the living room where her aunt was still talking to the person on the phone. She moved her right hand slightly making the ashes of the cigarette fall into the sink.

"Yes, she is here." she hisses. "No, I don't think she has changed her mind."

Beverly brought one of her feet over the counter where she was sitting and hugged her knee.

"Alvin, listen to me. You have to stop this."

The sound of that name made her feel all kind of awful things: anger, sadness, disgust. She threw the whole cigarette inside the sink and turn the water. She was starting to feel dizzy again.

"You murdered a man just because he made a drunk comment about your daughter. Do you think that is a good influence on her?" *Oh dear father, if that was just your only crime*, she thought bitterly. "Of course I understand you. If I've been there I would have been upset too." *Just as upset as he went whenever he saw me riding down the street with my friends? Just as upset to open my forehead open?* "But would I have murdered someone? No!"

The girl decided she had enough of that. She jumped off the counter and walked with big steps to the living room. Without giving her aunt any explanation she grabbed the phone from her hands and pressed it against her ear.

"I HAVE THE RIGHT TO SPEAK WITH MY DAUGHTER! EITHER SHE LIKES IT OR NOT!" she heard him shout. Even though she felt

terrified she kept her voice steady and firm.

“Don’t call this number ever again.”

“Beverly? My dear Beverly is that you?”

“I’m serious. This is the last time I tell you.”

“Please, baby. I promise I will never phone you again only if you pay me a visit. It’s not far from home.” Yes, Derry’s prison wasn’t far from their old house. House, not home; never home. She felt her eyes wet as her mind took her back into the old department, into her old bedroom. Her childhood bedroom.

“Root in hell, pervert.” she muttered before hanging up with violence. Her aunt stared at her with wide open eyes full of terror. Terror of knowing what his brother had done to her niece during a couple of years.

“Sweetheart.” she tried to pull her into a hug but Beverly hit away her hand.

“Don’t touch me.” Bev took a couple of deep breathers and passed her finger through her short hair. “We need to change our telephone number.”

Her aunt, who had taken a few steps back nodded in agreement. “I’ll do that soon.”

“On Monday.” she demanded. “I’m going to my room.”

She passed next to her aunt and jogged upstairs. “Sweetie.” she stopped and looked back at her aunt from the top of the stairs. “I’m sorry.”

For what? Because you think you let my father touch me? Because you think my mother would have stopped it if only she had been alive at the time? For what are you sorry?

“It wasn’t your fault.” she lied. She lied because deep inside she blamed every single adult that had passed through her life for letting him ruin her. She blamed everyone else because deep inside she

knew that if she ever blamed herself, she would definitely steal the sheriff's gun and put a bullet inside her brain.

American dreams came true somehow

I swore I'd chase 'em till I was dead

I heard the streets were paved with gold

That's what my father said

Eddie gave Bill and Ben a couple aspirins and waited for them to actually swallow them. The three boys were sitting on Bill's basement in silence. Even though Bill's parents had been deeply disappointed of their kid's actions, they were glad he hadn't been hurt, kidnapped or murdered. Ben, who was staying with the Denbrough for the weekend due to his mother's business trip, had been forced to telephone his mother to tell him what had happened. He was grounded but because Bill wasn't, Eddie was allowed to visit even though he had to sneak out of his house first.

"How are you feeling boys?" Eddie teased them as he sat on the armchair they had placed in one corner of the over crowded room. Bill and Ben were currently sitting on the sofa with their heads hanging and his eyes closed do to their headaches.

"Shut up." Ben groaned. Eddie smirked.

"You brought this on yourselves." replied the boy. Bill half-opened one of his eyes. "Don't give me that look. I asked to leave."

"The only thing I regret is not f-f-forcing you to d-d-drink with us. I b-b-bet you would have d-d-died on the first cup."

"Seriously? That's your only regret?" Eddie asked with a mischievous smile plastered on his face. Bill frowned at the comment.

"What?"

“Max?”

Bill sat up and put his head between his hands as the room around him decided to spin. Oh, that. Ben had also decided to join the conversation instead of still sulk into his sickness. His eyes were fixed on Eddie, asking him what was he talking about.

“It-t-t was nothing.” Bill answered. “She was too d-d-drunk, I was too drunk.” Eddie raised an eyebrow. “I d-d-don’t even like her like t-t-that!”

Ben winced at his friend’s loud tone.

“If you say so.” Eddie, being still upset for his friends’ behavior last time, wanted to mess with them as long as he could.

Talking about that, he had to get ready to tease Stan about him and the Richie boy. They stood in silence for a while. Ben and Bill trying not to die and Eddie thinking about the last person he thought would take enough space in his brain to make him remember him during a Saturday afternoon: Richie. The boy was annoying as hell, talked non stopped and had decided to make it his personal task to find him all kind of stupid nicknames. In normal circumstances he would have avoided that kind of people at all costs. But now that Richie, and the rest of the Hawkins’ kids, were part of their group, he found himself drawn into his hyperactive aura more than anyone else’s.

“Earth to Eddie!” Ben called him. Eddie looked up.

“What?”

“You zoned out on us.”

Eddie nodded slowly. “Sorry, the lack of sleep seems to be affecting me too.” Big gave him the middle finger. “Hey, guys. I wanted to ask you something.”

“What is it?”

“What do you think of the new guys? Answer honestly.”

Ben stared at him like if he had said the strangest thing ever, and that

was a new one considering Ben knew all the creepy and weird things of Derry.

“Why are you asking that? You don’t like them?”

“No! It’s not that!” he rushed. “It’s just that, maybe I was too used to being only us five and now all these new people just came into our lives and...” he tried to put his thoughts in order before continuing talking. “I guess I’m just scared things are going to change between us, the originals.”

Bill, who had listened to him in silence, sat up to look at Eddie face to face. “Remember when we were just the three of us? Stan, me and you?” Eddie nodded. “We were best friends and had a lot of fun together. Then Beverly came and after her Ben. They joined our group but did we stopped being best friends?” Eddie shook his head and finally a smile appeared on Bill’s lips. “No, we got more friends. So don’t worry so much.”

Eddie was about to say something when he was interrupted by Bill’s father who was calling him to go upstairs. The boy stood up and waited a few seconds to compose himself. When he left the room he gave Eddie a soft pat on his shoulder.

“Should we tell him?”

Eddie watched as Bill closed the door and then turned back to Ben. “That he didn’t stutter during his speech?” Ben nodded. “No, let’s not ruin the moment.”

No one even knows how hard life was

I don't even think about it now because

I finally found you

Oh, sing it to me

El expected a lot of things from Hopper. From a big screaming speech about responsibility and being stupid, to being ignored for hours. She

didn't expect he would take her to a dinning to get her some breakfast. When he picked her up from Will's place she had thought she was about to die. The movement of the van only made her nausea worse and her head was pounding so hard she found unbearable the sound of the metal as the vehicle moved down the road.

"Remember this feelings." Hopper had told her as she glared at the eggs and orange juice before her. "Remember how bad you feel now the next time you decide is good idea to drink."

El had only nodded.

It was almost sunset when she heard someone ring on their doorbell. She was watching tv when she heard it and she was tempted to pretend there was no one home. She didn't feel like dying anymore but the idea of moving from the sofa didn't sound thrilling. Plus, she was watching some cheesy romantic movie and the girl had just returned the boy all the gifts she had given him after a big fight the night before. They were currently crying about how he kept all those useless things and how it meant that he loved her. El couldn't understand how those things meant love if love was something non-material according to Hopper and the dictionary. When the bell rang a second time Hopper shouted at her to get the door. Since Hopper was currently making dinner, it was her duty to see who had decided to made them a visit. As El sat up and put her flip flops she guessed it was probably Joyce or one of Hopper's subordinates. Not many people visited the house anyways.

It was the second surprise of the day to find Dustin standing on the porch with her black sweater between his arms.

"Hey El." he smiled at her. El opened the door a little bit more and stepped out of the house. "Glad to see you feeling better. I brought you your sweater. You left it in Jonathan's car."

El frowned. He looked so fresh and not dizzy. "I hate you! You made me sick."

Dustin blinked. "What?"

"You made me feel sick!"

"I don't recall forcing you to drink anything. Plus, you were already tipsy when I got to the party."

She wasn't convinced. "Why aren't you sick?"

"Are you kidding me?" Dustin laughed. "I threw up my stomach, liver and some lungs this morning after you left. If it wasn't for Steve's miracle remedy I would still be laying on Will's floor."

El stared at him and decided to forgive me, after all he was right about somethings. The girl inspected the sweater. Right, she had arrived to the house with a jacket instead of her sweater. Now she remembered. She looked back at the house and then at Dustin before taking the piece of clothing. "Come in, I'll bring your jacket."

Dustin was about to enter when Hopper's voice came from the kitchen. "Who is it?"

And like if he had stepped on fire, Dustin jumped back away from the door.

"Just Dustin."

The boy's face went pale as paper. "You know what? You can give it to me on Monday."

"Tell him to stay where he is." Hopper's voice sounded a little louder, angrier.

"I have to go."

"But he said you had to..."

"He is going to kill me."

El thought about for a moment. "I don't think so. He wasn't that angry during breakfast."

Hopper appeared a second later and Dustin had no time to escape. The man indeed didn't look angry but Dustin knew better. When adults don't look angry, they are usually furious.

“Hello Dustin.”

“I swear I didn’t notice her drinking that much! Plus, I was drinking too so I wasn’t able to take care of anyone else who wasn’t me. Hell, I couldn’t take care of myself. Well...” he paused for a moment. El was looking at him surprised and not sure of what was going on. “But you are right. She said she was coming with us and I should have taken her back to you the moment the party was over. So sorry about that. But here is her sweater.” Hopper raised an eyebrow as he passed his eyes from Dustin to El who officially had no idea why Dustin was talking so much. “I have it just because last night it was wet and I gave her my jacket. I swear that was it.”

The two teens heard the man chuckle. Was that a good or a bad sign? Dustin took a step back when the man took a step forward towards him. Maybe Dustin was right for being scared of the sheriff.

“This is strike one, kid.” it was all that he said and then he returned back to the house.

El watched him leave and then her attention returned to Dustin. It hadn’t been that bad after all. “Do you still want me to give you the jacket on Monday?”

Dustin nodded slowly, still pale and shaking slightly. El smiled at him, still not understanding but not giving it much of a thought, she still didn’t understand a lot of things. “Well, thanks from bringing this over.” What was she supposed to do now? Say goodbye and close the door? It didn’t feel right. Not with Dustin on the edge of passing out. She sighed as she thought about it. Dustin had brought her her stuff, somehow like in the movie... Oh!

She leaned over and planted a kiss on the boy’s left cheek. Maybe it wasn’t like in the movie but a kiss was a kiss, she supposed. “See you on Monday.” and with that she stepped into the house and closed the door behind her.

Finally alone, she looked at the sweater and brought it close to her face, she loved how soft it felt against her skin. Joyce had bought it for her before arriving to Hopper’s and she was grateful a woman had taken charge on getting her some more feminine stuff. She loved

overalls and flannels were fine and comfortable, but she liked how Beverly looked too and she was glad at least last night she had looked pretty-bitchin. When the fabric was close enough she sense something different; a different smell. El sniffed it and immediately recognized it as the smell Dustin's clothes had. A soft smile appeared on her face.

No one even knows what life was like

Now I'm in LA and it's paradise

I finally found you

Her sweater smelled like Dustin and she wasn't sure why it made her happy.

Oh, sing it to me

Notes for the Chapter:

Thank you from sticking around.

Hope you liked this new chapter. It's a little bit slow but I want to build tension slowly.

Leave your comments telling me what you think about this story so far. See you soon.

4. Ride

Summary for the Chapter:

Live fast
Die young
Be wild
And have fun

Notes for the Chapter:

Warnings: underage drinking and abuse of police power (I think that is the term; correct me if I'm wrong)

Ride

September was almost over and things were changing quickly around him. He despised change but he found some comfort on how things were moving around him. Richie... Richie... That name that clouded his mind lately. Stan wasn't sure what it meant to be in love with someone. He was aware how it looked like: blushing, nervousness, awkwardness... He had seen all those symptoms around his group of friends but he had also seen how those things didn't last long. Love wasn't one of those things that attracted the attention of the young man so he found it conflicting having those feeling for Richie.

September was almost over and that Monday morning the school was celebrating an assembly to talk about things absolutely no one had interest in. The boy was walking between Mike and Bill who were chatting about his football practice and the upcoming game. Ben and Mike had joined the football team during the second week of September just like Eddie had joined the swimming team (it looked his mother was afraid he would eventually drown on the lake because of his friends) while Stan had decided to join the basketball team as extracurricular.

“Stan, aren't-t-t you excited f-f-for the game?”

Stan looked at Bill not sure why he had asked him that. “Why?”

“Because of the band contest next week.” answered Mike with a huge grin on his face. “That’s the only thing those dorks have talked about the last few weeks.”

Oh, right. He had totally forgotten about the whole deal. The trio entered the auditorium and looked around trying to find their friends. The place was practically empty so, realizing they were the first ones to arrive, they sat on an empty row and leaving enough spaces between each other so everyone could fit. Stan sat near the middle of it and decided to read a book while he waited for the whole thing to be over. Their friends came in little groups and while they sat the noise around Stan became louder and louder making it impossible for him to read.

“Stan the man.” he heard Richie sat next to him. He noticed Eddie had sat between Richie and Beverly. The whole group was now in the auditorium, just in time before the assembly started.

Stan tried to keep his attention on his book but it was a little too hard to concentrate having Richie practically leaned over him. Considering Richie and he were almost the same height, he found it weird to have the other one’s head resting on his shoulders while their arms brushed innocently.

Stan turned the page of his book.

Twenty minutes passed and Stan noticed a new kind of touch on the back of his palm. His eyes moved from the page he was on and saw how Richie’s finger was drawing invisibles figures over his naked skin. Stan looked up and noticed that Richie seemed to be interested on whatever the principal was saying and whatever he was doing was out of his control; like if it was something unconscious. Stan swallowed loudly but didn’t move his hand away. No, instead he turned his palm and held Richie’s fingers. The boy turned to see him slowly. There was a mischievous smile that Stan hadn’t noticed before.

“Do you ever stop moving?” he whispered.

“Never.” Richie bit his bottom lip and Stan felt him move closer. “Is that such a shocker?”

Stan smirked. He couldn't believe how annoying Richie could be but at the same time he enjoyed it. He enjoyed Richie's attention, and he hated that. Because he hated feeling so linked with someone and not being able to resist the attraction. Suddenly he felt observed. His eyes moved slightly forward, just behind Richie's grinning face and noticed that from the corner of his eye Eddie was watching them. If he didn't know Eddie the way he did, he wouldn't have noticed that, even though his face was facing the stage, his gaze traveled quickly from there to where Stan and Richie were almost cuddling.

Stan felt self conscious. He wasn't like that. He was never like that; he never let people near him. Ashamed of whatever had passed through his mind at that moment, he pulled his hand away from Richie's and moved his body as far as he could from the boy. Of course Richie stared at him confused. Of course he could see the disappointment in his eyes but Stan didn't offer him an explanation or even a second look. He had to get his shit together, for the sake of both of them, for everyone's sake.

If someone had told him years ago he would be part of a band, Eddie would have called them bullshit. First of all, because he couldn't play any instrument and he was terrified of being under the spotlight. Now, after almost two weeks of band practices with the rest of the group, he found himself unable to image any other way to spend his Wednesdays and Fridays after school.

Dustin and Richie had asked him some weeks before if he was interested on joining their just created band. Eddie had glared at them unable to understand why would they want him (him from everyone in the school) to join them. It hard turned out Lucas had heard him sing while he showered and had considered him the perfect addition to their band. So that was the story of why he was currently inside the music classroom between Richie and Dustin and their guitars while Lucas marked the beat with the drum sticks.

Eleven was standing in the middle looking at the broken microphone they had gotten from a garage sales some days ago. She was the lead singer in most of their songs so Eddie didn't had to worry about being the center of attention. Her on the other hand, it was surprising how neutral she took the news about them joining the band contest.

" Tommy used to work on the docks, union's been on strike. He's down on his luck. " she started singing. Eddie noticed how Dustin eyes went from El to his guitar and back to the girl. El noticed it as well and a small smile appeared on her face. *"It's tough, so tough. "*

It had been Richie's idea to make a Bon Jovi cover, and El and Eddie had been in charge to select the song considering they needed to get something they could actually sing without having to change too much the song and the notes. As they started rehearsing they had found out Eddie could reach higher notes than the girl so they had decided to let her sing most of the song but leave the backgrounds and high notes to the boy.

"It doesn't make a difference if we make it or not. We've got each other and that's a lot for love. " Eddie turned to his right and noticed Richie entirely focused on the guitar between his hands. He took a deep breathe to join El in the next verse. *" We'll give it a shot ."*

During rehearsals everyone tended to move around, still uncomfortable working as a team. Richie most of the times jumped back and forth, sometimes almost crashing El or Eddie in the process. El would walk around looking at the floor while singing and Dustin had a weird tendency to follow her everyone. Eddie and Lucas were the ones that barely moved; Lucas because obvious (drums) reasons while Eddie felt it was more likely to mess anything up if he moved around. But something Eddie did was trying to keep close to Richie. Maybe it meant some unintentional hits and bumps but he felt on ease with the hyperactive teen on his side. That practice wasn't different.

"Tommy's got his six-string in hock. Now he's holding in what he used to make it talk. So tough, it's tough."

El was starting to move but this time it was her who walked towards Dustin instead of the opposite. *" Gina dreams of running away. When*

she cries in the night, Tommy whispers: Baby, it's okay, someday. ”

Eddie watched in silence the interaction. It was obvious Dustin was smitten on El. It was so obvious for everyone else it was almost painful, mostly because he was pretty sure El felt the same way. Maybe she wasn't aware of it. It wouldn't be crazy, she had lived almost her entire life caged unaware of the world and its implications and emotions. Her not understanding something so complex as love wouldn't be weird. Eddie's eyes traveled once again towards Richie: he wasn't even sure **he knew** how romance and all those things worked.

Both vocalist started singing at the same time but El turned her body to Dustin, like if she was starting to sing to him. Dustin also moved and started muttering the lyrics as he tried to keep up with the song. “ *We've got to hold on to what we've got. It doesn't make a difference if we make it or not. ”*

Eddie noticed Richie's eyes glance at him. “ *We've got each other and that's a lot for love. ”* a dump smile appeared on the shorter guy's face. “ *We'll give it a shot!*”

They sang the chorus without a problem with Eddie getting to the high note with not much of a problem. When Dustin started his solo El started mimicking his movements like if she was playing an invisible guitar. The rest of the guys cheered them up. Eddie couldn't help to notice how fluid and carefree their interaction was. Like if they were meant to share that exact moment.

“ *Woah, we're half-way there. Woah, livin' on a prayer. Take my hand, we'll make it I swear. Woah, livin' on a prayer! ”* They repeated the chorus and, after the song was over, everyone screamed in joy. Just a couple more things to be fixed and they would be remembered at the freshmen that rocked the school. Still they rehearsed their backup song and, after they considered it was enough for a day, everyone started gathering their stuff.

While El put on her jacket Lucas, Richie and Eddie made their way towards Dustin.

“Ask her out.” They said in a whisper at the same time. Dustin

blinked, confused.

“You like her dumbass.” Lucas added. Eddie noticed how El had stopped whatever she was doing and was staring at them with interest. “Go on, ask her to go out.”

“Are you guys crazy?” he answered a little too loud.

“Is everything okay?”

The four guys turned around at the same time. “Nothing.” Like if that wasn’t suspicious. El nodded slowly but didn’t add anything. Eddie saw from the side Lucas hitting the boy with his elbow.

“Hey, El.” Dustin moved away from his friends and slowly reached the girl. “You are going to the the police station, right?”

“Yes, like everyday after school.”

Lucas and Richie tried to suppress their laughter; Eddie found that sweet.

Dustin chuckled and rubbed the back of his neck nervously. “Yeah, right. What I meant, can I go with you?”

“Do you need to ask Hopper something.”

“No! I mean...” he looked back at them asking for backup. “I want to walk you home. May I?”

“You wouldn’t be taking me home, just to the police station.”

Eddie concluded he had enough and walked towards the couple. If he knew nothing about love, Dustin was clueless about normal social interactions. “He is asking you if he can go with you becuae he wants to get you some...” he trailed off hoping Dustin would catch the idea.

“Ice-cream!” he shouted and El jumped a little surprised. “Sorry. I wanted to ask you if you wanted to buy some ice-cream with me before getting to the station.”

El smile practically lighted the whole room. "Okay."

Singing blues has been getting old

You can be my full time baby,

Hot or cold.

Eddie watched as Richie put the guitar back into his place. They were alone because Richie had wanted to practice a little bit more the third verse of the song and Eddie felt right to use the opportunity to arrange some vocals he was having troubles with. They practiced for a while, not paying attention to the time.

"It's getting late." said Eddie at some point. Richie had nodded and together started putting everything in their respective place.

They worked in silence, something rare in Richie so Eddie guessed there was something troubling his friend.

"A penny for your thoughts?"

"I'm pretty sure they are not that worth it."

Eddie finally pushed the last chair to it's place. "I know moron, it's just an expression."

Richie smiled and took his bag from the floor. Eddie did the same and together they left the room after locking it. The school was almost empty and through the windows the sunset light came across painting the walls of orange and pink. They walked in silence. Outside the buses that took the kids back to Hawkins were gone. Eddie looked at Richie who didn't seem troubled by the situation.

"I can take another bus." he said as he walked with Eddie towards his bike. "Good thing those ones stop their routes around 12:00pm."

"Your parents won't be upset?"

The other one shrugged and Eddie let the topic slip. If Richie wasn't comfortable talking about something he would wait until he was. They started walking in direction to Eddie's house.

"What do you think about dating between friends." Richie said out of nowhere as they went closer to the other's house.

Eddie was taken back. Not because he had never thought about it (for God's sake Beverly had dating two of her friends and he had to admit Bill and Stan weren't bad looking), but because he suddenly felt his heart rate go crazy with hope.

"I think it's okay. I mean, if you are their friend you get to know them before and you can't mess it up so badly." Eddie shrugged trying to stay calm. Did Richie knew about his crush? Did he suspected it? What if his feelings were reciprocated? "Why? Are you interested in someone in particular?"

Richie smiled with ease and Eddie felt his cheek go red.

"Maybe." Richie bit his thumb without losing eye contact with him. "Do you have a girlfriend?"

Eddie looked away as he held tighter the handlebar of his bike. "No."

"Why not? You are super cute."

"I'm not into girls." Richie opened his mouth in a big "Oh". Fuck, had he just fucked things up. "Does it..."

"It's okay." Richie smiled at him. Eddie had to look away again.

"What about you, Trashmouth? Any girlfriend you have hidden from us?"

"Currently I'm single and ready to mingle."

Eddie felt his heart go crazy. They stood in silence for almost a minute before Richie spoke again.

"What about Stan?" Eddie's heart stopped for a second. "Do you know if he..."

Eddie's hope shattered and his blood run cold inside his body in less than a second. Stan, he was interested with Stan. Part of him had considered that possibility but having it as an actual fact... it hurt.

"He isn't with anyone at the moment." his gaze fell to the floor.

"Cool."

They turned to the left and walk some meters in silence. Eddie was already able to see his house.

"Can I ask you something?"

God, could this go even worse?

"Has he ever been with anyone before?"

Eddie turned and felt his mouth go dry. Stan didn't like people in general so he was unaware if Stan had ever had anything with someone that wasn't part of their club. Now that he thought about it, the way Stan had grown so comfortable with Richie in so little time was surprising. "No, I don't think so."

"Oh." again that answer. Eddie felt so helpless. Finally they reached his house.

"Has he ever said anything about me?" Eddie held the the handlebar so hard his knuckles went white. He knew what he had to say.

He knew he had to be a good friend and move away from whatever could happen between Richie and Stan just like Bill did with Beverly and Ben. When Bill did that in the past he was sure that he loved Beverly and still he stepped aside. Eddie wasn't even sure if he had those kinds of feelings towards the boy. He knew he felt happy, and weak, and awkward, and good whenever he was with Richie. But that was love? Or was he just felt to comfortable around him? That was possible. Everyone seemed to relax whenever Richie was around.

"Eds?"

"Don't call me like that." he struggled to get out the next words, already feeling them burning his throat and tongue. "He likes you."

Eddie felt his gut twist the moment he saw Richie's face light up.

"Really? What did he say?"

Why did he had to make this so hard? "He hasn't *said* anything, but it's pretty clear." Eddie had to look away towards his feet. "He lets you hug him, he actually takes the time and effort to make comebacks to your stupid comments and..." he paused for a second, remembering. "Last Monday, at the assembly." He had been so blind. "What other sign do you need?"

Eddie felt two thin arms surround him and he found himself holding his breath. "You are an amazing friend, Eddie. Thank you."

"Yeah."

He saw Richie walked away and waited until he was out of eyesight to enter to the house. It surprised him it took him a couple of seconds to really get what had just happened. It surprised him it took him a couple of seconds to crumble down. "FUCK!" he screamed as he fell to the floor and started crying silently.

Was that what heartbreak felt like?

Don't break me down

I've been travelin' too long

I've been trying too hard

With one pretty song

I hear the birds on the summer breeze,

I drive fast, I am alone in midnight

He was stuck. No, he was uninspired, which was worse. The pen hit the notebook page making a fine line when Ben heard something hit

his window. The boy waited for a second and then he heard it again. It was almost 10pm and it was odd that someone could be needing him at that time during a Thursday night. He opened the window and found Beverly waving at him from this backyard. What the hell? He was about say something but Beverly ordered him to shut up putting her finger in front of her mouth while the other hand pointed at the kitchen door. Ben took the hint and after closing his window, he sneaked out of his room.

“What are you doing here?” Ben whispered as he opened the door and let the girl enter to the house.

“Just visiting my boyfriend.”

“At this time? Since when?”

Beverly just rolled her eyes. “Your room?”

“My mom is home.”

Ben followed as she made her way through the kitchen and get to the stairs.

“I’ll be quiet.” she sentenced before jogging upstairs. Ben followed her and, after checking his mom was still watching tv inside her room, he entered his where he found Beverly waiting for him sitting on the bed.

“What were you doing before I arrived?”

Ben sat next to her but not before getting his notebook from the desk. “Working on the poem I’m going to read on Saturday.”

Bev took the notebook from his hand and started reading.

Again in complete silence, Ben took his time to inspect Beverly’s face as she read. He enjoyed watching her. She had all kind of facial expressions for all kind of situations: she she was mad her nose wrinkled in a certain way it looked she was smelling something nasty or gross; when she was sad one corner of her lip moved slightly to the side and when she was nervous she would pass her hand through her short hair. So whenever Ben gave her something to read, he

would look at her face, ready to figure out whether she liked it or not.

"It's not bad." she started still looking at the page.

"But?"

"It's missing something." she bit her lip and Ben saw her eyes scan the paper. "I don't know what, I just feel it."

"I know, right!" Ben added. The girl finally looked away from the notebook and started digging inside her bag. "What are you doing?"

"Have you ever heard of Buottowski?"

"Do you mean Bukowski?"

Beverly sighed. "Tomatoes-tomatos, Benjamin." she finally took out the bottle of vodka she had hidden inside her bag. "Let's get artistic."

Ben moves slightly away from the bottle. He hadn't drunk anything since the party and he wasn't sure he wanted to drink anytime soon.

"Where did you get that?"

"Stole it from my aunt." she opened it and offered it to him. "Here, follow the steps of your fellows writers."

"Not all writers drink, you know that?"

"No, some took drugs." she answered. "Just drink!"

Ben put his hand over her mouth, afraid his mom would hear her.

"Okay, okay." he took the bottle and after some seconds of doubt he took a small gulp. "It's horrible."

Bev took the bottle from his hands. "I know." he took a long drink. "I love it."

Almost two hours later and half of the bottle gone they were laying

on his bed trying not to laugh too loudly.

“I’m too happy to be a cursed poet.”

Beverly giggled. “Well, I heard most of them died broke, alone and young.”

The boy noticed how Bev trying to open the bottle and he took it from her.

“I’m glad you came over.” discreetly he hid it next to his bed table. “Even though I didn’t write a word.”

The girl smiled and, without saying anything, she leaned over and kissed the boy softly. The made-out lazily over the covers for a while but suddenly Beverly pushed him away. Ben looked at her, not sure if he had made something wrong.

“I’m sorry.” she whispered sadly. “Could you please hold me?”

Ben nodded and held her close. “Are you okay?”

“Too drunk.”

Ben pressed their foreheads together. “You know you can tell me anything.”

Drunk talk is Real talk . The girl didn't answer.

Been tryin' hard not to get into trouble,

But I, I've got a war in my mind

I just ride, just ride

“I’m picking you up at ten. Not a minute later, got it?” his

grandfather told him as he pulled over Ben's house. It was almost 6:00pm so they still had plenty of time before Derry's Open Mic. "Take care of yourself and don't make stupid decisions."

"I know, I know." Mike said as he opened the door of the car and went to grab his bicycle from the back of the truck. It had taken him a while to convince his grandfather to let him use the bicycle but he had managed to get him twist his arm and let him use it for "recreational use" (even though he was still on probation after the party fiasco). His grandfather walked next to him and, after Ben's mom opened the door, proceeded to introduce himself and give him their home number in case of emergency. Mike heard some noise coming from inside the house and immediately recognized Max and Beverly's laughs.

"Mike?"

"Yes, sir?" he answered in automatic. His grandfather stretched his hand and Mike noticed he was holding a new chain.

"Take care of your bike." Mike took the chain and smiled at the old man. "Have fun."

"Thanks." Mike saw him walk away and waited until he turned on the engine to enter the house.

Dying young and I'm playing hard

That's the way my father made his life an art

The group of friends left the house thirty minutes later. Because Will, Max and Lucas were dropped off by Jonathan they hadn't brought their own bikes to go to the library. Luckily Ben, Beverly and Mike had theirs. They had agreed they would share in order to get to the library faster. Beverly sat on the extra seat Ben had added to his bike while Max had agreed to accept Lucas' challenge and ride with Will on Bev's bike. Even though he hadn't been pleased at the beginning, Lucas was sitting on Mike's bicycle box he used to carry the meat during his errands.

"Come on, you turtles!" shouted Max as she pedaled faster. Mike saw

her past next to him and then disappear as she let the bike ride downhill without control. The rest of the kids laughed out loud at Will's shrinking scream.

When Mike reached the highest part of the hill he stopped. He was able to see the library from there and it frightened him. *Don't make stupid decisions*, he heard his grandfather's words. Max was already a street ahead of them and she seemed fine. Ben and Beverly passed next to him and they rode down the street without any problem. Still, Mike was frozen.

"Do you want to switch?" Lucas asked from the box. Mike looked up and shook his head. He had ridden down hills like that one before. Why was he nervous now? He looked at Lucas again and suddenly he understood. In the past, if he fell, he fell alone. He knew that falling was part of riding a bicycle but having someone with him, someone who trusted him that he wouldn't mess up and fall, it made him scared. It made him aware of the danger of falling in such velocity.

"Aren't you scared we can fall?"

Lucas took a glimpse to the bottom of the hill. Ben had stopped and the couple was looking up towards them, waiting.

"I guess a little bit." Lucas finally answered. "But that's what makes it interesting, right?"

Mike swallowed and looked at the street before him. "Okay."

Lucas grabbed the handlebar and looked back at Mike one more time.

"Just in case: don't pull the front brake." Mike chuckled. That was one of the top rules according to his grandfather.

"All right." He started pedaling. "Here goes nothing."

Drink all day and we talk 'til dark

That's the way the road dogs do it – ride 'til dark.

Mike liked books. No, he loved books, but as he sat among his friends and listened to the artist that had signed up to read their stuff, he realized his deal was history. Yes, he could enjoy a good fictional story but he couldn't grasp poetry. Which made him feel horrible when Ben asked him what he thought about his poems and he had to stick to the same stereotypical answer. The teens walked outside the library and chatted about the things they had found interesting and beautiful. Mike listened to them in silence, he had really enjoyed the evening with his friends. He had enjoyed every single moment and he was sort of sad his grandfather was supposed to pick him up in less than an hour, mostly because he knew the rest of the kids were going to stay and sleepover Ben's house. He understood, yes, he had to help the man at the farm first time in the morning, and he didn't mind doing it. It was just that in that exact moment he really wanted to stretch that night a little longer.

"Shit, guys." Beverly cursed once they reached the parking lot. "I forgot my sweater inside. Let me go get it." She turned around and ran inside the building.

"Let me go help her." Added Ben as he followed her.

"Hey, I saw a cool book poster inside their monthly mural boletin." Max said out of nowhere, the three guys looked at her. "While they are on that I'm going to grab it." and without saying anything else she sprinted.

"Max! I don't think you can do that." Will ran behind her screaming. Mike looked at Lucas, kind of suspecting he was going to follow Will and stop Max from making something stupid.

"She is going to do it anyways." he said to no one in particular and walked to where their bikes were chained. The parking lot was already empty, making the place even creepier than what it normally was. *Derry is a creepy place in general*, Mike thought as he took his key from his pocket. He put it inside the lock but, instead of snapping open, the item didn't moved. Mike frowned in confusion and tried again.

"Something wrong?"

"It's not working." It was probably roast, or maybe the lock had dirt inside of it. He pulled the key but it was also stuck inside, great.

"Here, let me try." Lucas kneeled beside him and tried to make the thing work. In fact, the only thing he was doing was twisting the key with violence.

"You are going to break it!"

"Trust me, I got this." he let the key alone and from his sweater he took off one of the pins he used to decorate the denim. He used the thin part of the accessory to try to get out of the lock. He was in the middle of achieving his goal when the boys were lighted by the light of a lintern.

"Hey, punks. What the hell do you think you are doing?" Mike turned around and his blood went cold: Butch Bowers.

"Our lock isn't working, sir." Lucas answered with ease. Mike was surprised he could feel so relaxed with Official Bowers staring directly at them.

"Get away from the bicycles and put your hands where I can see them."

Lucas glared at him. "Are you serious? We are not trying to steal anything." Mike was already moving aside.

"Can you prove that bicycle is from your property?"

Mike remained silent but Lucas wasn't having it. "What? Do you need a receipt?"

"Shut up." Mike hissed, aware the officer was starting to get annoyed. But Lucas didn't stop.

"No, this is your bike. He is the one who was no proof we were stealing."

Suddenly they weren't forced to face the white light anymore but that didn't relaxed Mike, in fact, it terrified him. When he felt Bower yank him by the arm he didn't fight back. *Don't make anything stupid.*

“What are you doing? Let us go.”

“I’m taking you where you little punks deserve to be.”

“We were doing nothing wrong!”

Mike saw the police patrol and a shiver ran down his spine. He knew he wasn’t doing anything wrong and still he knew Bowers wouldn’t listen. He never listened.

“Hey! Wait!” Mike heard Ben’s voice screaming. Bowers turned around and Lucas finally stopped fighting. “Why are you taking them?”

“These thieves were trying to steal that bicycle.” the officer said as he pointed at the bicycles with his head.

“It is his, you ass!” Beverly snapped back. Mike could swear he felt Bower’s fist holding him tighter by the arm.

“Sir.” a third and familiar voice came to the rescue: the librarian. “The kids are telling the truth.” Mike stared at the old woman. “I’ve known Mr. Hanlon for a long time and I know that is the bicycle he uses to deliver the meat around town.”

The Officer's eyes focused on him. “Is that true?”

“Yes, sir.” his voice sounded so low and weak. He could feel everyone’s eyes on him, burning him. The hand around his arm opened and he was free. Still, he couldn’t move.

“If you say so, lady.” The man turned to his right where Lucas was still standing, still furious. “Next time, do what the law tells you to do.”

Mike saw Lucas nod and with that the man left the place. Mike still didn’t move. A pair of hands touched his shoulders and he shoved them away. Without saying anything he walked towards his bike.

“I’m fine.” he said and he twisted the key. The lock snapped open.

They reached Ben's house fifteen minutes after ten. Mike saw his grandfather standing in the front yard next to Mrs. Hanscom. They glared at the children as they approached the house. Mike pedaled faster.

Don't leave me now

"Boy, I told you at what time I was going to be here." the old man said. He saw the boy throw the bike the moment he jumped off it. Mike didn't listen, all he did was run into his grandfather's arms and hid his face on his chest.

Don't say goodbye

He took a deep shaking breath the moment those strong arms surrounded him.

Don't turn around

"What happened, son?" the man whispered. Mike shook his head.

"I want to go home." he sighed. "I just want to go home."

Leave me high and dry

I just ride, I just ride

Notes for the Chapter:

I hope you enjoyed this chapter even though it was a little bit longer and with more drama. I just warn you: expect more. Also, it would be nice to get some comments about how do you feel with the story so far: Do you like it? Hate it? Could improve? What do you expect?

Song played by the band: Livin on a prayer: Bon Jovi

5. Brooklyn Baby

Summary for the Chapter:

They say I'm too young to love you
You say I'm too dumb to see
They judge me like a picture book
By the colors, like they forgot to read

Notes for the Chapter:

Warnings: this chapter deals with insecurities, low self-esteem and mentions of a racial crime.

Brooklyn Baby

Alone, she felt so alone. Inside the dark room, inside the small rectangle with only a lightbulb as moon and a roof painted black as sky. 'Papa!' She screams but is unable to move from the corner where she is sitting. Her knees were pressing against her chest and could still feel the lingering pain on her back. 'Papa'. She screamed again. This time the door opened.

El woke up covered in sweat and with still some tears rolling down her cheeks. She looked around and for a second the darkness of the room scared her. She had to remain herself she wasn't *there* anymore, she was safe, she was free. Still, she couldn't shake off the feeling of tightness in her chest or the way her muscles were clenching ready to fight back an invisible threat. Slowly, she climbed off the bed. She knew she wasn't going to be able to go back to sleep anyways.

Her feet took her to the living room where she collapsed over the bed after turning on TV and the VHS player. The movie started just where she and Hopper had left it the night before: Pinocchio was just being rescued by Jiminy Cricket from the cage. The girl hugged her knees as she stared at the screen. She knew the movie almost by memory but she still enjoyed watching it which was driving Hopper mad;

mostly because he had spent a good amount of money on other movies.

“Kid?” El jumped at the sudden appearance of the voice. Hopper was behind the couch watching her with curious eyes. “It’s 5 am.”

El looked at him and then down, ashamed. “I woke up.”

“Another nightmare?” She nodded. The man sighed. “Okay, move.”

The girl obeyed and Hopper sat next to her without adding anything else. They watched the movie in silence.

“You know you can talk to me.” Hopper said after the movie ended. El stared at the screen as the credits rolled. “or Joyce. We are here for you.”

“I know.”

Hopper didn’t wait for her to add anything else so he just patted her head softly. “It’s getting long.” he commented as he tried to change the subject. El touched one of her curls and smiled awkwardly. After a lifetime of having her head shaved, she was finding having long hair a weird situation. On one part she liked it; it made her look as pretty as the people in the tv or the girls in her school. On the other hand, considering it was her first time having long hair and Hopper had little idea how to groom curly hair, it was messy most of the time. Still, she wouldn’t change it for anything in the world.

They finally turned off the tv and decided it was time to make breakfast. El went straight to the freezer to get a box of Eggos while Hopper started making the healthy part of the breakfast.

“Hey, kid. I forgot to ask you last night.” Hopper said as he put some oil inside the pan. “How are you doing in your classes?”

El froze for a second. “Good.”

“Really?”

The girl nodded. Of course she wasn't the best at any subject or understood everything or was able to stay focused for too long. Luckily her friends were smart and she was smarter for using all the help they offered. But still, it wasn't a lie she struggled, specially...

"I saw the note fall down from your bag."

El winced. Of course he knew. Hopper barely asked her about school. She guessed he just hoped she was doing her best and passing her classes.

"You failed your english pop quiz."

Hopper put the two plates on the table. El grabbed the warm waffles and put them on a third plate. They sat facing each other. El wasn't able to look him in the eye. It was her third failed quiz in the last month.

"I thought you were doing better."

"I am."

Hopper sighed and El felt even worse, and it wasn't that she could escape to go to school. It was still early and they had plenty of time before the bus passed for her.

"Do you need a tutor?"

"No."

"Maybe you could ask any of your friends to give you a hand."

"No." She had misspelled < <house> >. She couldn't show that to any of her friends.

"Kid."

"No."

"Why not?"

El felt her cheeks burn and her eyes water. She had never showed

any of them her exams because they were pathetic. She wasn't just failing them, she literally couldn't get a single whole point in them. Whenever she saw them she remembered the psychologist diagnosis days after she was rescued: *linguistic, reading and writing skills of a first grader* .

"I don't want them to know."

Hopper nodded and El saw him rub his face with his hands. He tended to do that when he wanted to find the solution to things. He mostly did it during work hours but lately he did that because of her. She hated that.

"You need to study more if you don't want to fail that class." El nodded. "Which means no more distractions." *Oh, no.* "Maybe you should tell Disting you can't be in the band anymore."

"NO!" she screamed as she hit the table with her hands. He couldn't be serious.

"Don't raise your voice at me, kid!"

"I want to stay in the band."

"But you *need* to pass English. Priorities."

"Why can't I do both?"

Hopper threw his arms in desperation. "Okay, so tell me. If I let you stay in the band; what will you do to fix the problem?"

El frowned. "I'll ask Bill." she mumbled. It wasn't like she hadn't considered it during the last few weeks. Bill was the best in english and he was always helping Richie and Beverly with their papers. She had considered it but asking for help would mean she would have to show him her exams and homeworks... She passed the sleeve of her sweater over her eyelids to dry the tears that were about to appear.

"El."

"I'll ask him. I'll do better." she answered sharply. "Promise."

They ate their breakfast in silence.

El sat next to Max on the bus. She knew that if she sat next to Dustin it would only mean he would expect her to talk (or at least answer his questions) and she wasn't in the mood. The girl next to her moved her bag so she could sit. They exchanged a look and Max sort of understood she wanted to be left alone for the moment. Dustin, who was sitting behind them, leaned forward so he could rest his chin on the seat.

"Hey El." he greeted her. El turned around to offer him a polite smile but that was it. She was able to see the disappointment on the boy's eyes but she needed... silence? She wasn't sure what she needed anymore.

The bus made three more stops and on the fourth Lucas appeared. Next to her Max tensed as they noticed the empty look inside the boy's eyes. El could sense something was wrong.

"I need you to move." Max said after Lucas passed next to them and sat on the last row of seats.

"What's happening?"

"Nothing. Move!"

"Tell me what's wrong."

"You wouldn't get it."

El tensed her lips but stood up to let the girl pass. She saw her practically run towards Lucas and sit down next to him. She guesses he was upset, but about what?

El sat down where Max had been and she sort of hoped Dustin would sit down next to her. It was stupid because at the beginning she had desired to be left alone. And she still wanted that silence, but she also sort of needed the sense of company Dustin's presence gave her.

She looked back and noticed his eyes were fixed on the notebook

between his hands. She faked a cough to catch his attention but he didn't move. Defeated, she sat down again and looked at the road as the bus kept its route.

On its last stop it picked up Will with other two guys that lived in the farthest houses of the town. The skinny boy looked at the empty seats beside El and Dustin, trying to figure out where to sit. El rolled her eyes and moved so she could rest her head on the window. On corner of her eye she saw Will move towards the seat behind her. She closed her eyes. She wanted to avoid the world around her for a while.

Math and lack of sleep were an awful combination: add a surprise quiz and you get the perfect equation for disaster. El stared at the paper before her. She knew all the stuff. Richie had made sure to help her during their free periods and she could remember how easily they had completed their homework in those occasions. But now, she was in blank. Lazily she scribbled her name on top of the paper and stared at the numbers and letters for a while.

It was useless.

She stood up and gave the teacher her exam without saying a word. The man looked at the paper and then his eyes traveled back to the girl. "What happened, young lady?"

She rose her shoulders. "May I sit down?"

The man nodded and put her exam aside, it was obvious there was nothing inside it to check. Everyone finished just minutes before the bell rang announcing the end of the class. The girl had used that time to rest her head over her arms and take a little nap. Maybe she needed some sleep. Maybe some sleep would make her Monday a little bit better. God, she was wrong.

As she walked to her next class she ran into Mike. As Lucas, El noticed something off with the boy.

"Hey, El." he greeted her as he faked a smile. El did the same. It was the polite thing to do according to Hopper and Joyce. Smile even if

you don't feel like it; you don't want people around you to feel bad too. "How was your weekend."

"Nothing to share."

Mike nodded. "Boring, huh?"

"You could say." They walked slowly, both wanting to avoid entering to the classroom too soon. "You?"

Mike tensed. El stopped and stared at him. She wanted to ask what was wrong. She wanted to *know* what was wrong with his friend but there was no time. As they walked to the first floor, they saw Lucas walking with Stan and Ben.

"Lucas!"

El saw as Mike ran the rest of the stairs while Lucas stopped to give him a mean look. The girl frowned; was Lucas *mad* with Mike?

"I don't want to talk to you."

Mike froze. El finally walked towards them and, like the other two boys, watched the scene in silence.

"Please, we need to..."

"I don't need anything from you!" Lucas snapped. "You are a coward."

Mike face broke. "If you just let me explain."

"No, I don't want to listen to you." Lucas pushed Mike as he walked to his next class. "Leave me alone."

El stared at Lucas' back as he walked away. Stan and Ben exchanged looks said nothing. The last one was the first to move and ran towards Lucas without saying a word. Stan looked back at Mike.

"Are you okay?" he asked not sure of his words. El looked at Mike too and saw the sadness and despair in his expression. She knew sadness. She knew despair.

“I need to go.”

El grabbed him by the arm and tried to stop him.

“What happened?”

“Nothing.”

El wasn't having it. “I want to know. Tell me what's wrong. Why is Lucas mad? Why is Max worried? Why are you sad?”

Stan put his hand on her shoulder but she brushed him away. Mike was growing desperate.

“You wouldn't understand!” he yanked his arm away from the girl's grip. “Just let it go, okay?”

“Wait.”

Lucas turned around and glared at Stan. The boy, who was jogging to try to catch up with him, slowed down and started walking at Luca's pace.

“I know you are excited about Social Studies but this is too much.”

“Excuse me?”

Lucas turned his head to see the taller guy and found him with a completely neutral expression plastered on his face. There was no rage, sadness or even happiness in his eyes. He wasn't even looking at him, his eyes were fixed ahead of him. That was something it always made him uneasy about Stan. It was like he knew everything while the rest of the world had to guess what was going through his mind; it was unnerving.

He heard Stan sigh. “What you did to Mike, really not cool.”

The boy rolled his eyes. Of course he wanted to talk about Mike. The problem? He really didn't want to talk. He was so mad and it wasn't just with Mike; he was upset about the whole situation.

Unconsciously his hand touched over the fabric of his sleeve the bruise that had started forming that Saturday night.

“You don’t understand.”

“Ben told me everything.” Stan’s voice kept his neutral tone, the same he used to talk about school and movies. It drove Lucas mad. “At least what he saw.”

“So you probably think I shouldn’t be mad at Mike.”

Stan finally turned to see him. “No.” He stopped and so did Lucas.”What I’m saying is maybe you don’t understand.”

Lucas was glaring at him but let him talk.

“I don’t know how things work at Hawkins but here in Derry, people are mean to people that are different. Here, people are mean and do awful things, like, monster-kind-of-things. And they have hurt Mike’s family in a lot of terrible ways.” Lucas felt a knot appear on his throat and a heavyweight collapse over his chest and stomach. Still, he tried to remain calm. Part of him knew Stan was aware how guilty he was starting to feel.

“What kind of things?”

Stan finally give him a hint of a true emotion: discomfort.

“That is not my story to tell.” he paused for a moment, like if he was trying to find the right words for what he wanted to say. Lucas waited patiently. “Listen to him. You don’t have to agree with him or coincide; just listen and try to understand. I’ve heard you are good with that kind of stuff.”

Lucas frowned. “Who told you that?”

A small, minimal, smile appeared on Stan’s lips. *Max ...*

“I’ll see what I can do.” he finally said. Stan nodded and started walking again. It took Lucas a couple of seconds to move.

Second and Third period weren't so bad for El. Mike skipped English, that was bad, but the teacher decided to ignore her and didn't force her to read her essay in front of the class like the rest, that was good. Art was good, art was always good because there were no right or wrong answers. She liked when there were no chances of screwing things up. Fourth period wasn't as good.

F, she sighed as the teacher passed their latest exams. The man stopped beside her and, when she finally looked up, he said with stern voice. "Disappointed, Ellie." the girl looked up and tried really hard not to cry. She had studied all night for that history exam. She had tried to so hard. "Profoundly disappointed."

Luckily she didn't share that class with any of her friends. Unluckily, things in history only went worse.

She knew the teacher was talking about World War II. She could hear him talk but she was too busy checking the notes she had made during the weekend about the subject.

"El?" *Please, not now.* "Do you know the answer."

Twenty pair of eyes landed on her. She remained quiet.

"What caused the start of World War II?"

El slipped down her seat trying to make herself invisible. Why couldn't she remember that?

"Mrs. Hopper."

"It started in 1939."

"That wasn't the question."

She took a deep breath but didn't answer. She couldn't. She didn't know how. The teacher sighed loudly.

“Anyone?”

Everyone around her lifted their hands at the same time. El would never admit it, but when she let her head rest on her open notebook she saw a couple of tears moisture the paper and the ink.

She practically ran out of the classroom. She wanted that day to be over and she still had more classes to attend; plus she had rehearsal with the boys. She passed her sleeve over her eyes and cleaned away the rest of the tears. Maybe things would get better after lunch. Maybe...

She saw Dustin ran across the hallway. El looked at him and a small smile appeared on her lips. Dustin always made her feel better.

“Hey El.” he greeted her without really stopping but rather slowing down. “Nice seeing you, I gotta go.”

The smile on her lips disappeared. “Where are you going?” She stopped him by grabbing the sleeve of his jacket. Dustin almost fell trying not to pull El with him.

“Run some errands.” he rushed. “It’s nothing. Don’t worry about it.”

“You can tell me.” she tried again.

He shrugged. “Seriously, El. It’s nothing.”

El could feel something inside her boil. “I want to know. Tell me.”

“Why do you want to know?” Dustin tried to pull away but El wasn’t going to let him go.

“I want to know.”

“Come on, El. Just, forget it.”

Suddenly the thing inside her exploded. “Why? Because I’m too stupid to understand?!” Dustin blinked surprised, not ready for that answer. “I’m sorry I’m stupid and I don’t understand anything. But I can’t learn if you don’t tell me. You promised you would help me

understand. You all promised me!”

She was shaking and too late noticed she was crying. People around them observed while they murmured between each other. Dustin, who was now holding her by the arms, pulled her into a soft hug.

“Let’s go somewhere else.” Dustin took her by the wrist and guided to an empty classroom. Finally alone, El expected Dustin to demand her an explanation. She owed him one, she guessed. She waited for Dustin to tell her she was stupid for being so dramatic. She waited and waited but none of those things came. Instead, she felt the soft touch of two hands on her wrists. She felt ten fingertips run down her palm and then hold her hands in a soft embrace. A sweaty forehead touched hers and their curls mixed together. He remained quiet, waited for her to start the conversation, to let her lead.

“I hate being the freak.” she finally whispered. Dustin’s fingers held her hands tighter. “I hate being different. I hate to need help.” She closed her eyes but that was the only movement there was inside the room. Everything around them was immobile. “I want to be like you guys.”

“We all need help.” Dustin answered. El shook her head. “I need help.”

“Liar.” El pulled her hand away from Dustin’s and wiped a tear that was threatening to fall in any moment.

“No, seriously.” Dustin chuckled as his cheek became a darker shade of red. “I’m going to tell you but you can’t tell anyone, okay?” El nodded quickly. “I need to take extra hours of art.”

“Why?”

Dustin shrugged. “Because I can’t make a straight line even if my life depended on it. According to the teacher it’s possible that I’ll be the first kid on her class to fail art. Impressive, huh?”

“That’s wonderful!” El shouted as she jumped.

“I wasn’t expecting that.”

"I can help you!" For the first time in that day, El was smiling, truly smiling and the best part was Dustin was also smiling. Finally there was something she did good enough to be useful to one of his friends.

"That would be awesome, El." Dustin took her hand again. "So, what do you say? Lunch now and then art classes after school?"

El nodded. "One thing. I need help with English."

"Okay." Dustin said without giving it much importance and tried to pull El out of the room. The girl stopped him.

"Real help."

"Okay, I can help you too this afternoon. But we have to keep my "artistic" problem a secret, deal?"

"And we keep my "english" problem a secret too, okay?"

Lucas had found Mike sitting on his own in the bleachers. He was eating his sandwich as she stared at the football field in front of him. Lucas walked slowly, still trying to plan what to say. Mike had missed third period and he had heard from Beverly and Eddie that he hadn't arrive to Math either.

The bleachers creaked with every step he took so it didn't surprised him to see Mike glaring at him from where he was sitting. When he finally sat down next to him, Lucas felt his throat dry and his hands sweaty.

"What are you doing here? I thought you didn't want to see me." Mike talked first.

"I'm sorry I acted like an ass this morning."

"Apology accepted, you can go now."

Mike wasn't even looking at him, his eyes were down, avoiding

Lucas' gaze.

"I didn't just come here to apologize." Lucas bit his lip. He hadn't noticed before but he was twisting his own hands nervously. "Why were you so afraid to say something to the officer?"

Mike just frowned but didn't answer.

"I don't understand why he didn't believe us about the bike."

"Because he is a closed minded idiot who thinks still lives on the 50's." Mike spat out but immediately that anger vanished and the sadness returned to the eyes of the boy. "I'm sorry about Saturday, okay? You shouldn't had gone through that."

"Has he ever done something like that to you before?"

Mike shook his head. "I always try to avoid him and when he notices me I do what he tells."

"If he had order you, would you have left your bike?"

"I could have returned with my grandfather to get it back on Sunday."

"But that wouldn't be fair!"

"Life in Derry ain't fair!" Lucas saw that anger crawl back into Mike's eyes but he saw it mix with the sadness that was there before. He remembered Stan's words.

"Okay." He wouldn't fix anything by fighting with Mike about something neither of them could change.

"Officer Bowers hates my family and all the people who are not like him."

"You mean, black people?"

Mike nodded. "I mean EVERYONE who isn't like him or who doesn't agree with him. But he specially has something against my family."

“Because my grandfather accused him of provoking the fire.”

“What fire?” Mike froze, maybe that was the story Stan had told him about before. “Sorry, I shouldn’t have asked that.”

“You know, don’t you?”

Lucas shook his head. “I heard something happened, but that’s it.” he paused for a second. “You don’t have to tell me.”

“My fathers died in a fire and my family, including me, are sure Bowers had something to do with it.” Lucas couldn’t believe Mike had blurted that out so quickly. They stared at each other for some seconds. Lucas noticed how the other one was trying so hard not to cry but the redness around his eyes gave him away. When he talked again his voice broke slightly. “ He terrifies me. Is that what you wanted to hear?”

Lucas let go of a breathe he had been holding. He knew that Mike didn’t need an answer, plus, it seemed he had forgotten the basics of human speak. Instead, he just moved closer and put an arm around Mike’s shoulders and pulled him close. It wasn’t a complete hug but the closeness was enough. Mike didn’t cry but didn’t say anything else. It wasn’t necessary. They missed fifth and sixth period and after school was over they joined the rest of the group who were leaving the school building. The two boys joined the conversation easily and in seconds their conversation became a second thought and then a blurry echo inside their heads.

Notes for the Chapter:

About Bowers and his part on the Hanlon's death, it is a headcanon I had since I saw the movie (IT, 2017), just clarify that. Also, sorry for the late update and this weak chapter. I had so much work during these last few weeks and my brain didn't had the capacity to write and survive at the same time. Still, I hope you enjoyed this new chapter.

Author's Note:

Note 1: I didn't add Mike Wheeler because: 1)There is already another Mike (IT) and I think it would only make the reading harder; 2)Since Finn plays both characters, I rather stay with his portrayal of Richie for the sake of this story.

Note 2: Other thing about the pairings: I know most of them are not popular ships (Dustin/Eleven or Stan/Richie) but I like them and I feel they work for the story. I don't have problems with Mike/Eleven (I like them in the series) and I adore Richie/Eddie.

Note 3: Even though I'm taking inspiration from some movies and tv series, there is also part of my personal experience as teenager. I was fourteen the first time I drank alcohol and so did all my friends during the Quinciañera parties, a lot of my female friends lost their virginities between 8th and 9th grade and I saw my 15-year-old friend being driven to the hospital because of alcohol poisoning. So in that department I am taking things from my own experience but other subjects that I touch are based on research and what I've seen in media, so if I make some mistakes, sorry... Other than that I hope you enjoy the fic.